

## **Empathy and Osteopathy**

**A systematic review of empathy and an evaluation of empathic skills of practising osteopaths and the importance of these skills in the relationship between therapist and patient.**



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## **Abstract**

### **Empathy and Osteopathy. A systematic review and cross-sectional survey**

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## **Background**

Empathic skills are considered as a quality criterion in the communication between therapist and patient and consequently they are going to become more and more important. The term empathy is reflected with respect to various conceptions. The fact that empathic skills influence treatment results in a positive way emphasizes the importance of the therapist's social competence.

## **Objectives**

To represent the background and the connections between different meanings of the term empathy. Evaluation of empathic skills of practising osteopaths and demonstration of the importance of these skills in the relationship between therapist and patient.

## **Materials and Methods**

Searching for literature was carried out in the relevant biomedical databases. The search strategy was targeted on research concerning empathy, therapist - patient relationship, and interpersonal communication.

The cross-sectional survey was addressed to 63 practising German osteopaths who receive a questionnaire, composed of the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE) and outstanding osteopathic context related questions. The selection of the sample proceeded with reference to the list of the German Association of Osteopaths (VOD), assorted by a simple random system. The JSPE-Score showed the empathic skills of the participants and was analyzed by a Likert-Scale (minimum 20 = high empathy orientation, maximum 140 = low empathy orientation).

## **Results**

The systematic review revealed that empathic skills develop during the first bonding between mother and child, predominantly with non-verbal mimic, gesture and touch. Those experiences in early childhood form brain structures and influence emotional behaviour. Every type of touch is linked with these very first imprinting, newly acquired emotional experiences can be integrated. The human brain has the continuing ability of learning during the whole life.

For the survey 47 osteopaths (24 women, 23 men) responded and filled in the questionnaire. The results display an average overall score of the questionnaire of 52 points (SD  $\pm$  13.5). Consequently the position of the mean score is established in the lower third and refers to a high empathic orientation of the participants. Empathy especially in therapist patient relationship was assessed by a subscale

suggesting an analogue result (mean of 3.7 points, SD  $\pm$  2.4, within a range from 2 – 14). The results of the survey further emphasise the importance of non-verbal communication.

## **Conclusion**

The study was a first step towards the integration of empathy into the osteopathic concept. Study participants demonstrate a high empathic orientation and suggest the importance of empathy in osteopathy. The quality of our work and patients satisfaction could be influenced highly by empathy.